

Castlemaine Naturalist

December 2007

Vol. 33.1 #350



Conserving Native Biodiversity on Private Land 9/11/07

In March this year Phil Collier and Robyn Garnett bought a 19 hectare private conservation reserve to the east of Devonport in Northern Tasmania from the Tasmanian Land Conservancy. Noted particularly for its rare orchids, this property seemed just right for them especially as Phil had already written a field guide to Tasmanian orchids! They named the reserve Rubicon Sanctuary as it is situated in the Rubicon Catchment area in North Central Tasmania.

Rubicon Sanctuary (photo above) is comprised of open swampy areas dominated by sedges and grasses, wetter areas with Black Gums and Swamp Gums, lightly wooded areas dominated by Black Peppermints and drier heathland. Over 200 different plant species have been recorded on the property, including 39 different species of orchid. Threatened species recorded include: Black-tongue Finger-orchid, *Caladenia congesta*, Robust Fingers, *Caladenia tonellii* (endemic to Tasmania), Marsh Leek-orchid, *Prasophyllum limnetes* (endemic to Tasmania), Pretty Leek-orchid, *Prasophyllum pulchellum* (endemic to Tasmania), Holmes' Sun-orchid, *Theelymitra holmesii*, Swamp Wallaby-grass, *Amphibromus neesii*, and Hairy Brooklime, *Gratiola pubescens*. The area is also the home of a threatened crustacean, the North coast burrowing crayfish, *Engaeus granulatus* which can be identified by the rough patches on top of its pincers.

Framework for protection

These Protected Areas are specially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and are aimed at protecting genetic diversity, species diversity and ecosystem diversity by developing comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) protected area systems using Protected Area Management Categories with outlines of management methods for each category (The World Conservation Union). By 2004 Australia had established 7,720 reserves as part of the

National Reserve System and nine Protected Area systems.

Rubicon Sanctuary is one of the private covenanted reserves protected as a 'Habitat/ Species Management Area' and is designated mainly for conservation through management intervention. The land comes with a Nature Conservation plan outlining the conservation values of the land, the management action required to maintain and enhance them and also a set of criteria that the Department can use to monitor the owners' management policies. The criteria for monitoring success includes continued regeneration of native flora, no significant decline in native species, decrease in weeds, and no introduction of the root disease Cinnamon Fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.

Robin and Phils' management of their land began with the task of updating and ratifying their plan for submission to the Department of Primary Industries and Water for approval. Since then they have worked at defining which of the 154 Tasveg communities and sub communities are present on their land; counting yabbie holes along transects; and with the support of the local fire brigade they have commenced a 5-10 year mosaic burn cycle in the swamp areas and a 10-20 year cycle in the woodland areas.

Their management plan states that fire should be the main tool used to protect and maintain biological diversity and already Robin and Phil have been confronted with some of the difficulties of environmental management using fire. Fire can have a detrimental effect on Black Gum and Swamp Gum woodland while lack of fire can have a detrimental effect on the number of orchids – and fires at different times of the year have different effects. It requires knowledge and a fine balancing act to get it right.

To carry out the burns neighbours have to be informed and firebreaks around the designated areas have to be slashed and raked etc. It involved a lot of hard work but two months after the fire Robin and Phil were rewarded with the sight of rare leek orchids!

One acre of the property has been designated as a domestic zone where Robin and Phil aim to build an eco friendly house and possibly establish a demonstration domestic garden using only plants that grow in the area naturally.

Rubicon Sanctuary is fortunate indeed to have such dedicated and wise owner/ caretakers.

Geraldine Harris

Field Trip - Wewak Track, Porcupine Ridge. 10/11/07.

Leader: R. Piesse

Wewak Track again proved to be a very worthwhile destination for a spring flower excursion.

We found most of the plants on our 2005 list although some were past their best due to the dry conditions.

Those flowering were -

Black's Goodenia *Goodenia blackiana*

Black-anther Flax-lily *Dianella admixta*

Bluebell *Wahlenbergia* sp.

Common Beard-heath *Leucopogon virgatus*

Common Raspwort *Gonocarpus tetragynus*

Common Wedge-pea *Gompholobium huegelii*

Creamy Candles *Stackhousia monogyna*

Downy Grevillea *Grevillea alpina*

Fryerstown Grevillea *Grevillea obtecta*

Grass Trigger Plant *Stylium ameria*

Grey Tussock-grass *Poa sieberiana* var *sieberiana*

Heath Tea-tree *Leptospermum myrsinoides*

Many-flowered Mat-rush *Lomandra multiflora*

Matted Bush-pea *Pultenaea pedunculata*

Milkmaids *Burchardia umbellata*

Scented Bush-pea *Pultenaea graveolens*

Showy Parrot-pea *Dillwynia sericea*

Slender Groundsel *Senecio phelleus*

Slender Rice-flower *Pimelea linifolia*

Sticky Everlasting *Xerochrysum viscosum*

Tall Sundew *Drosera peltata* ssp *auriculata*

Wattle Mat-rush *Lomandra filiformis*

White Marianth *Rhytidosporum procumbens*

Additional flowering plants found this year were -

Blue Pincushion *Brunonia australis*

Daphne Heath *Brachyloma daphnoides*

Green-comb Spider-orchid *Caladenia* sp.

Slender Sun-orchid *Thelymitra pauciflora*

Slender Westringia *Westringia eremicola*

Tiger Orchid *Diuris sulphurea*

Yam daisy *Microseris* sp 3

Birds heard (thanks to Cathy Newing) – Pardalote, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Rufous Whistler

Geraldine Harris

Thank you to this month's newsletter contributors.

Articles and observations over the summer months most welcome.

Of Birds and Places - Rita Mils

As I have already said, I was disappointed, but not really surprised, on our trip to the West at how few birds I saw, although the number of species seen reached 102, with a few special sightings.

One of the species doing quite well wherever we went in the dry country seemed to be Yellow-throated Miners. Crested Pigeons also came up on the list quite often and we also saw two pair of Major Mitchell Cockatoos and the White-winged Wrens, but in very few places did we see birds flitting across the road as we have on earlier trips. We only saw Apostle Birds occasionally, Pied and Grey Butcherbirds from time to time, even BBBs (big black birds) were fewer than before - I mostly gave up trying to work out whether they were Little Crows, Little Ravens or Australian Ravens, but at one stage or other I managed to identify all three species.

On the way across the Ross Plain we stopped at one of the tanks just past Mundrabilla for a cuppa, and confirmed that I'd been seeing Brown Song-larks. While I watched one, another bird was sitting just nearby on top of a bush, and on another bush a Black-faced Woodswallow. The middle bird I finally realized was my first sighting of a Red-throat, a female. Soon after a Pied Honeyeater joined them! On the way home we stayed for two nights at Frazer Range Station and on our walk in the morning I at last saw a male Redthroat - in fact, two of them.

We didn't see many Red-rumped Parrots, and I only once recorded Bluebonnets. Australian Ringnecks were seen in various forms reasonably often, especially the Twenty-eights in Western Australia. I was surprised at how seldom I saw Galahs, but we saw a number of flocks of Little Corellas, and in the West we saw both the White-tailed Black Cockatoos - Carnaby's (confirmed by a birdo local) and the Long-billed. I also spotted three of the endemic Red-capped Parrots this time. Western Rosellas were seen several times.

One afternoon we walked to the beach near the lighthouse at Geraldton, and there, sitting on the top of a post was an Osprey. I got the impression that it was having a job hanging on, as there was a howling wind and very rough seas. I got a few photos, but none are very impressive! We followed the coast to Leeman, south of Dongara, before turning east to Enneabba, where we found a pair of Ospreys, apparently hunting, and there was another pair near the caravan park we stayed in at Fremantle. For the whole trip we only recorded six or seven Wedge-tailed Eagles, and about half a dozen Black Kites, very few Kestrels, about 3 Black-shouldered Kites and a couple of Whistling Kites.

We saw very few Wrens, and I seldom identified Thornbills, though when we were staying at Dalwallinu I came almost literally face to face with a

Western Thornbill. Other special little birds were Splendid Wrens and White-breasted Robins on Mount Clarence at Albany.

I have quite a few waterbirds listed, though they were mainly in towns, the beach or at Lake Bribra, south of Perth, and the most often seen were Pacific Black Ducks - not Wood Ducks, which is what I expected.

Honeyeater species were Singing, Brown, Pied, Spiny-cheeked, White-plumed, New Holland and White-cheeked. As well there were Red, Brush and Little Wattlebirds and Noisy and Yellow-throated Miners.

And did we see any Emus? Yes, a few, mainly at the Stirling Ranges, and a Dad Emu and seven stripy youngsters near Frazer Range.

Observations

- 11/11 For about the past week we have had a Rufous Songlark in our back paddock at home and this morning Allan and I saw 2 White-winged Trillers at the Golf Course as well as two Black-tailed Native Hens. Also Nankeen Night Heron. Debbie Worland
- Indian Minors nesting in tree hollows in Blakeley Road. Rita Mills
- Rainbow Bee-eaters seen coming out of hole in bank of the Loddon River at Guildford. Geoff Harris
- 18/11 Sound like a bomb proved to be a tree blown to bits by lightning just 300m from house. Also first Golden Whistler for years. Rita Mills
- 21/11 Four deer crossing Pullans Track. Alison Rowe
- Lifting Corrugated iron with care revealed what appeared to be a sleeping Sugar Glider – unfortunately it was dead. Chris Morris
- Echidna and Leaden Flycatcher at water trough in Merrifield Street and swooped by a Sparrowhawk along Merri Creek in Melbourne. Dennis Hurley
- Forked-tailed Black Kite on the Mooloort Plains near Tullaroop . Chris Morris
- Olive-backed Oriole, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Heath Wren, White-browed Woodswallows (30-40), two Masked Woodswallows and a Rufous Whistler at Muckleford South. Alison Rowe
- Bird count bonus - healthy koala by dam at Barkers Creek. G Harris
- 4/12 Two adult Powerful Owls roosting in a Stone Pine in Botanical Gardens have returned after going AWOL a few weeks. N. Young

Nomination Forms enclosed with this newsletter: Please consider nominating for a committee position.

Syllabus: Members are invited to contribute suggestions for speakers and excursions for 2008. Contact any committee member.

The Addicts - Rita Mills

My son, Jason, has an aviary with several parrots, and each morning he gives them some cut-up apple in a dish. One evening in early October when he came home from work he found five Silvereys flying around the cage with them, a bit upset because they couldn't find their way out through the gap under the door again. He cautiously opened the door and eventually managed to shoo them out without his birds escaping.

Next evening the same thing, only they were easier to hustle out this time. Next morning he decided the best way to avoid this, as they were obviously taking the parrots' apple, was to put some cut up apple in the tree nearby especially for them. They didn't hesitate, but that evening there they were, back in the cage again. That night they didn't take much time getting out at all.

Next day, same routine, but this time they were waiting at the door for Jason to let them out!

Jason reckons they are addicted to apples.

A Trip to Kingfisher Bay Resort, Fraser Island (September 2007) – Tony Morton

This is a very pleasant resort. Spacious, two-bedroom 'villas', many with splendid views of sea or bush, surrounded by National Park, mangroves within easy reach, some lovely long walks through sub-tropical woodland (Wallum?) or along sandy beach, lots of activities for children, three places to eat (one excellent), self-catering if you prefer (but you'll have to bring your own supplies on the boat with you!). Resort staff can organize long or short expeditions if you're interested. We stayed around the resort for the whole week, as there seemed so much to do and see there.

I didn't see many butterflies (14 species), but I was very pleased to see quite a few of the most Northern sub-species (there are six) of the Sword-grass Brown (*Tisiphone abeona rawnsleyi*) in a big sword-grass swamp (*Gahnia sieberiana*, *G. clarkei*, with Tea-tree bushes and a big-leaved Banksia). This ran through one side of the resort and out to the sea. The Sword-grass Brown, though common where it is found, never strays far from its food-plant, so is particularly threatened by 'development', for everyone hates the sword-grass – except diurnal lepidopterists! It is a mark of the sensible way this resort has developed that such a big area of this plant survives so abundantly. Sword-grass is also host to half a dozen species of Skipper.

List of birds seen on early morning walks:

Pacific Black Duck	Striated Thornbill
Pied Cormorant	Blue-faced Honeyeater
Australian Pelican	Lewin's Honeyeater
Osprey	White-cheeked Honeyeater
Brahminy Kite	Dusky Honeyeater
White-bellied Sea-eagle	Eastern Yellow Robin
Eastern Curlew	Eastern Whipbird
Bar-shouldered Dove	Grey Shrike-thrush
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Varied Triller
Yellow-tailed Black -cockatoo	Torresian Crow
Laughing Kookaburra	Mistletoebird
Rainbow Bee-eater	Welcome Swallow
Red-backed Fairy-wren	Tawny Grassbird
Large-billed Scrub-wren	

(Total number of species so far seen in the resort: 158)

It was interesting to see the way different species adopted the role of 'domesticated' birds in the absence of the latter. For instance, the Bar-shouldered Dove waddled around under café tables behaving just like the Feral Pigeon, Lewin's Honeyeater came to the deck of our villa and, sparrow-like, picked up crumbs and bits of cheese (head sideways to accommodate the curved bill) from table or floor, as did the melodious Grey Shrike-Thrush. These three species were very tame.

I saw an Eastern Whipbird, foraging on the ground in the low bush surrounding our villa, flap into a shrub and land again with a spider-filled curled leaf in its beak.

Under the foot mats in the very busy entrance to the resort, six inches below the thundering passage of guests and their luggage, was the mud nest of a Welcome Swallow with three gaping chicks within. My grandson revealed this to me under oath of secrecy (from which I hope I'm now released!); he had been shown the same nest the previous year.

Traces of blackish wax and much activity round a join showed that a hive of tiny black Native Bees had found safety under the boards of a very busy walkway.

From the Business Meeting 22/11/70

- Australians for Refunds on Cans and Bottles: The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club supports the introduction of a container deposit system.
- Hans to draft letter of support from CFNC for FoBIF submission re valuation of roadside trees in roadside management.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

December 2007

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Broadways, 7 Wheeler Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

Fri Dec 14. Members Night. Members' "Show and Tell". Share a few photos, a nature experience, a poem - be as creative as you like. Slide and digital projector available for use (jpeg or powerpoint format on CD or use USB key). UCA Hall, 8pm. Bring a plate of supper to share.

Sat Dec 15. December Christmas Outing: Vaughan Springs, 3pm. BYO meal and drinks.

2008

Sat Jan 12. January Breakfast. Barkers Creek Reservoir, Harcourt North. Depart from carpark opposite motel in Duke Street at 7.30 sharp or make own way to reservoir by 8am. BYO breakfast, chair, and binoculars. Contact: Geraldine Harris 5474 2244.

Fri Feb 8. AGM. Election of Office Bearers and Committee. Speaker: (To be arranged).

Sat Feb 9. Field Trip. (To be arranged)

2007 Committee

Natalie de Maccus (President) 5472 4499	Rita Mills 5472 4553
Alison Rowe (Treasurer) 0408 899 283	Chris Morris 0418 996 289
Hans van Gemert (Public Officer) 5472 1082	Richard Piesse 0448 572 867
Debbie Worland 5472 2474	Noel Young 5472 1345
George Broadway (Secretary) 5472 2513 georgebroadway@bigpond.com	
Geraldine Harris (Newsletter Editor) 5474 2244 gedharris@castlemaine.net	

Subscriptions for 2007

Ordinary membership: Single \$22, Family \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19, Family \$24

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.Inc
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